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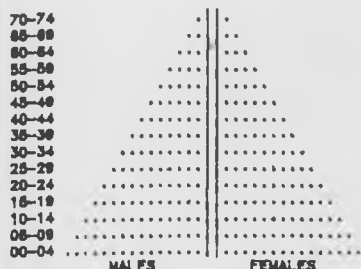


LESOTHO'S HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE: SOME REFLECTIONS FROM THE HOUSEHOLD BUDGET SURVEY

by
Tiisetso Makatjane

Working Paper No. 18
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Foreword

In this working paper Mr. Makatjane is investigating Lesotho's Household Structure Utilizing the 1986/87 Household Budget Survey Data. The analysis presented in the paper will be useful to students, planners, policy-makers and persons in the academic field. You are welcome to read it.

It is appropriate to remind you at this stage that contributions to the working papers in Demography are welcome from you.

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INTRODUCTION

Households are the smallest units of investigation used in most demographic inquiries. Other than using them as a frame for drawing nationally representative samples for most investigation, households are hardly ever used as primary units of analysis except in few indicators like household size and composition. However, the literature on the high and increasing percentage of households headed by women in the Third World, as well as the demographic and economic status of women heading households evidenced in the last decade or so (Youssef, 1983; Kossoudji and Mueller, 1983), suggests that analysis of households with a view to investigate socio-economic differences between households on the basis of the sex of the household head is revealing. Among the many interesting findings of research on female-headed households is their poor economic situation, which has become an important policy issue in developing countries (Peters, 1983: 106).

Despite the overwhelming literature on the emergence of migrant labour reserve economic structure (Keegan, 1986; Kowet, 1978) and the effects (social, economic and political) of labour migration in Lesotho (Halpern, 1965; Van Der Wiel, 1977; Sebatane, 1979; Gordon, 1981), the role of labour migration in shaping the household structure of the country has received little attention. On the other hand, migration is often cited as the main facilitating factor for the emergence of the phenomenon of female-headed households or "women left behind" (Lucas

and Ware, 1988; Peters, 1983).

Much as it is generally remarked that migrant remittances are the sole livelihood for rural households in Lesotho, the available literature suggests that income from migrant remittances is not equitably distributed between rural households (Murray, 1981: 51). But more importantly it is not clear how pronounced is the skewness of the distribution of migrant remittances between male and female headed households. Since labour migration is biased towards males, it can be deduced that male headed households are the main beneficiaries of migrant remittances as a main source of household income. However, the extent of the differences between female and male headed households regarding access to migrant remittances is yet to be fully established.

No systematic analysis of the characteristics of Lesotho's household structure has been documented. The need to fill this gap in the body of knowledge with respect to demographic as well as economic characteristics of households in Lesotho paying particular attention to the sex of the head of the household has necessitated the present study. The study examines the socio-economic characteristics of households in Lesotho with the purpose of investigating the extent to which female headed households are different from male headed households. The role of labour migration in influencing headship rates is also the thesis of the study.

SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

The source of data for the analysis is the Lesotho 1986/87 Household Budget Survey (HBS). The survey is a national sample survey. Two stage stratified sampling using 1986 population census enumeration areas as the sampling frame was employed in the survey. Rural households were stratified according to four ecological zones of Lowlands, Foothills, Mountains and Senqu River Valley whereas stratification in urban areas was with respect to income strata of high, middle and low. Thirty eight strata (24 in the rural areas and 14 in the urban areas) were utilised and in each stratum primary sampling units (PSUs) were groups of 200 to 600 households formed by combining census enumeration areas.

The first stage sampling was the selection of PSUs. Using systematic random sampling with probability proportional to the size of the stratum, where size was the number of households in the stratum, 122 PSUs were selected from the 38 strata. The second stage of the sampling procedure was the selection of the households. A systematic random sample of 7680 (4800 rural and 2880 urban) households was selected from the list prepared from the selected PSUs based on the 1986 population census for rural households and on a special relisting carried out in August 1986 for urban households. Further details of the sampling procedure can be found in the report of the Bureau of Statistics (1988: 10-16).

THE DATA

Two files of the Lesotho 1986/87 HBS, namely the individual file and the household file, were used in the analysis. The household file was constructed from the individual file. Some of the households which did not have complete information were probably excluded from the household file. This has produced an inconsistency in sample size between the two files. For example, the household file contains 7670 households and the individual file 7683; both figures are slightly different from the planned sample size of 7680 households for the whole country. Unfortunately the Bureau of Statistics gives no account of the discrepancy between the two files in the Lesotho 1986/87 HBS methodological report.

Other than the inconsistency in the number of households in the sample between the two files, assessment of data quality showed no incompatibility in the results for both files. Since some of the information needed for the present study, such as marital status of household head, is not included in the household file, the individual file had to be used. Depending on the file used, the number of households in the sample differs. To avoid confusing the reader, for each table the source will indicate whether the data are from the individual file or household file.

Maseru Urban was deliberately over-sampled due to greater variability of expected responses. The results in the study have been thus weighted. In order to give the magnitude of the sample size distributed according to

different socio-economic categories, in most of the tables the actual observed numbers have been indicated other than the weighted cases.

DEFINITION OF SOME TERMS

(i) **Household.** A household is defined as "a group of persons who live together in the same compound or dwellings and share the same sleeping facilities and/or the same cooking or eating facilities. Helpers living in the household and sharing the same cooking or eating arrangements are considered members of the household" (Bureau of Statistics, 1988: 5).

(ii) **Household Head.** This is defined as "a person (man or woman) who is present or absent and generally runs the affairs of the household and is looked upon by other members as the main decision maker" (Bureau of Statistics, 1988: 5).

(iii) **Rural-Urban Residence.** Rural refers to every part of the country which is not urban; Maseru Urban comprises all areas which have been officially declared within the boundaries of the city Maseru; and Other Urban refers to urban centres in each district headquarters (except Maseru), Maputsoe, Morija and Roma (Bureau of Statistics, 1988: 6).

(iv) **Labour migrant.** This is a member of the household (man or woman) who is working outside Lesotho and does not come home daily after work.

RESULTS

HOUSEHOLD SIZE

An estimated household size of 5.2 people (Table 1) is consistent with that estimated from other sources for Lesotho. The 1986 population census figure was 4.8 (Bureau of Statistics, 1987: 14), for the 1985/86 labour force survey the figure was 5.3 (Bureau of Statistics, 1988A: 9) and the results of the Mophale's Hoek Fertility and Mortality Survey indicates the mean household size of 5.2 people for some rural communities in Lesotho (Sembajwe and Makatjane, 1987: 1).

There are rural-urban differentials in household size. Rural households are larger than urban households. The small family norm characteristic of urban areas is also evidenced. This pattern is maintained regardless of whether one is comparing either male headed or female headed household or both (Table 1).

Table 1

Household Size by Rural Urban Residence and Marital
Status of Household Head: Lesotho 1986/87

	Sex of Household Head					
	Male		Female		Both	
	Size	N	Size	N	Size	N
<u>Residence</u> ¹						
Rural	5.6	3492	4.5	1270	5.3	4762
Other Urban	5.2	607	4.5	343	4.9	950
Maseru Urban	4.6	1387	3.8	532	4.4	1919
Lesotho	5.5	5486	4.4	2145	5.2	7631 ¹
<u>Marital Status</u> ²						
Single	3.5	157	2.9	160	3.2	317
Married	5.7	4983	4.2	210	5.7	5193
SDW ^b	3.3	374	4.5	1799	4.3	2173
Lesotho	5.5	5514	4.4	2169	5.2	7683

Note: a. Excludes 39 heads whose sex was not specified
b. SDW denote Separated, Divorced and Widowed

Sources: 1. Lesotho 1986/87 HBS household file
2. Lesotho 1986/87 HBS individual file

Female headed households are slightly smaller with a mean household size of 4.4 persons against 5.5 for male headed households. The relatively small size for female headed household, however, is more pronounced in the rural areas. But according to marital status of household head, household headed by men are larger except for separated, divorced and widowed (SDW) heads. Households headed by SDW women are not only the largest among female headed households, they are larger than those headed by SDW men

The smaller household size for female headed households, however, does not necessarily imply less burden in terms of dependants to support (Table 2). Generally households headed by women have slightly more dependants than those headed by men. Using a slightly different dependency ratio, Murray (1981: 56) also observed a higher dependency ratio for households headed by women. However, dependency ratios are highest in the rural areas and smallest in the urban areas. There are also more young dependents in male headed households than in female headed ones.

Table 2

Dependency Ratios by Rural-Urban Residence and Sex of Household Head: Lesotho 1986/87

Residence	Sex of Household Head	Dependency Ratio		
		Young ¹	Old ²	Total ³
Rural	Female	68	21	89
Areas	Male	73	12	85
Other	Female	65	15	80
Urban	Male	53	8	71
Maseru	Female	51	12	63
Urban	Male	53	7	60
Lesotho		66	20	86
		71	11	82

Notes: 1. Population aged 0-14 as a percentage of population aged 15-64

2. Population aged 65 and above as a percentage of population aged 15-64

3. All dependants (population aged 0-14 and 65+) as a percentage of population aged 15-64

Source: Lesotho 1986/87 HBS individual file

HOUSEHOLD HEADSHIP

Basotho are a patrilineal society. The extent of the traditional expectation that men should head households is demonstrated by the high proportion of households headed by men. Seventy three percent of the households are headed by men on a de jure basis. The figure for females is 27 percent (Table 3). Rural urban headship rates portray the same pattern, with about three-quarters of the households headed by men.

Age specific headship rates between rural areas and Maseru urban area are not dissimilar although other urban areas reflect a relatively higher age specific female headship rates. There is also an association between age and headship. The proportion of households headed by women increases with age while the opposite is the case with those headed by men. The pattern of age specific headship rates suggests a transition in the life cycle of a household. Households are generally headed by men in the young ages and women take over headship as they get older. It will be seen later when looking at marital status of household heads, that women become heads later in life through separation, divorce and widowhood.

Table 3Household Headship Rates by Rural Urban Residence:
Lesotho 1986/87

Age Group	Females		Males	
	Rate	N	Rate	N

Lesotho

20-29	17	177	83	533
30-39	13	320	87	1554
40-49	17	333	83	1348
50-59	32	482	68	1007
60+	47	747	53	855

All	27	2071	73	5301
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Rural Areas

20-29	11	35	89	260
30-39	10	100	90	891
40-49	16	177	84	872
50-59	32	326	68	695
60+	47	579	53	642

All	26	1217	74	3360
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Other Urban

20-29	32	47	68	76
30-39	33	80	67	199
40-49	27	52	73	135
50-59	39	70	61	100
60+	53	82	47	75

All	37	331	63	585
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Maseru Urban

20-29	33	95	67	197
30-39	23	140	77	464
40-49	24	104	76	341
50-59	28	86	72	212
60+	38	86	62	138

All	27	511	73	1352
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Note: Residence of 18 heads was not specified and 16 heads aged less than 20 and those whose age was not stated were excluded from the calculation.

Source: Lesotho 1986/87 HBS household file

The extent of household responsibilities entrusted upon women due to labour migration and its concentration in the early married life of couples is reflected by the large proportion of male heads of households who are labour migrants. The percentage of households headed by women on behalf of their husbands is very high and more pronounced in the rural areas (Table 4). Although on a de jure basis about one-third of households are headed by women, information in Table 4 suggests a higher de facto female headship rate. De facto female headship is at least 65 percent except in Maseru Urban where it is around 50 percent.

Table 4

Distribution of Male Household Heads who are Labour Migrants by Rural Urban Residence: Lesotho 1986/87

Age Group	Rural Areas		Other Urban		Maseru Urban		Whole Country	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
20-29	65	165	46	27	17	32	57	224
30-39	61	532	46	87	29	130	57	749
40-49	45	387	25	38	20	70	42	495
50-59	27	179	30	29	17	34	26	242
60+	6	37	12	9	5	7	6	53
All	40	1300	33	190	21	273	38	1763 ¹

Note: 1. Excludes heads with unstated ages

Source: Lesotho 1986/87 HBS household file

There is also a declining trend in the proportion of absent male heads with increasing age. Other than marriage dissolutions, retirement from mine work is probably the catalyst for the decline. However, the relatively low proportion of absent male heads in Maseru Urban are indicative of relatively better job

opportunities and a concentration of households headed by women in this area.

Whereas the majority of male headed households are married (91 percent), among female households heads SDW women are in the majority (89 percent). This is true regardless of rural-urban residence. In urban areas the proportion of single female heads is slightly higher, as expected (see Table 5). High remarriage and mortality rates among men relative to women could explain the low proportion of households headed by separated, divorced and widowed men.

Table 5

Household Headship Rates by Marital Status and Rural-Urban Residence: Lesotho 1986/87

	Rural Areas		Other Urban		Maseru Urban		Whole Country	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<u>Single</u>								
Females	38	30	62	45	53	85	46	160
Males	62	56	38	25	47	76	54	157
<u>Married</u>								
Females	2	78	7	63	5	69	3	210
Males	98	3183	93	583	95	1217	97	4983
<u>Separated, Divorced, Widowed</u>								
Females	81	1174	92	250	82	374	82	1798
Males	19	273	8	29	17	72	18	374
<u>All Heads</u>								
Females	27	1282	37	358	27	528	27	2168
Males	73	3512	63	637	73	1365	73	5514

Note: Rural-urban residence of one head not specified.
Source: Lesotho 1986/87 HBS individual file

THE MEAN AGE

The mean age for female heads is 56 years as compared to 46 years for male heads. This is expected since Basotho women normally attain de jure household headship relatively late in life through either separation, divorce or widowhood. Where widows are concerned, it is equally likely that the age gap could be a result of the mortality difference between women and men.

The relatively lower mean age for male heads is maintained regardless of place of residence. However, the age gap between female and male heads reduces with degree of urbanity of place of residence. While in rural areas the age gap between male and female household heads is 11 years, it is 5 and 2 respectively for Other Urban and Maseru Urban. Furthermore, probably due to age and education selectivity of migration, young educated people who are more mobile are concentrated in the urban areas leaving old people to head households in the rural areas.

Table 6Mean Age of Household Heads by Rural-Urban Residence and Marital Status: Lesotho 1986/87

Sex of Head	Rural Areas	Other Urban	Maseru Urban	Whole Country
<u>Single</u>				
Females	41.2	30.1	29.0	34.9
Males	36.0	30.2	31.4	34.3
Both	38.0	30.1	30.1	34.6
<u>Married</u>				
Females	47.7	38.1	35.7	44.4
Males	46.4	43.8	42.1	45.9
Both	46.4	43.4	41.8	45.9
<u>Separated, Divorced and Widowed</u>				
Females	59.5	52.9	48.8	58.3
Males	55.2	51.1	52.2	54.9
Both	58.6	52.8	49.4	57.7
<u>All Heads</u>				
Females	58.3	48.8	43.8	56.3
Males	47.0	43.6	42.1	46.4
Both	50.0	45.5	42.6	49.1

Note: Heads with unstated ages excluded

Source: Lesotho 1986/87 HBS individual file

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

The population of Lesotho strongly depends on subsistence farming. Both crop production and livestock rearing are important activities (Bureau of Statistics, 1988B: 21). Despite the emergence of a labour reserve economic structure in Lesotho by the latter half of the nineteenth century, access to farming land and ownership of livestock remain important economic assets. While many Basotho men migrate to South Africa (S.A.) to work in the

mines, possession of fields and livestock remains the main form of security at retirement from mine work or when one is rejected by the migration system.

While the proportion of households without livestock and fields is the same for both male and female headed households, fewer female headed households own livestock (Table 7). Since livestock rearing is a man's venture among the Basotho, coupled with the fact that men have money from mine wages which they often use to buy livestock, it is not surprising that livestock ownership is correlated with male headship. Normally women own livestock through inheritance at the death of a husband who owned livestock as they do not have enough money to buy livestock even if they are employed. It is very rare, if it happens at all, for a woman to invest in livestock.

Furthermore, possession of farming land without livestock, particularly cattle to provide draught power for ploughing, is of limited economic value as draught power, or money to hire it, is a crucial factor in determining the income from subsistence agriculture. This suggests that, although female heads report subsistence agriculture as the main source of household income, the value of that income is small as they lack inputs to improve output from subsistence farming. The dilemma of having access to farming land without labour and draught power or money to hire it, which is facing households headed by women has also been observed in Botswana (Peters, 1983: 106).

Table 7Percentage Distribution of Rural Households by Possession
of Livestock and Fields

	Male	Female	Total
Fields and Livestock	51	39	48
Fields only	23	42	28
Livestock Only	10	3	8
No Fields/Livestock	17	16	16

Source: Bureau of Statistics, 1988B: 20

SOURCE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Labour migration is not only male dominated, but it also mainly benefits male headed households. For migrant remittances to be a source of income for any household is conditional upon presence of a member within the household who is a labour migrant. Since labour migration discriminates against women, migrant remittances are therefore the main source of household income among male headed households while subsistence farming is the main source for female headed households (Table 8).

Table 8Households by Main Source of Income (%)

Source of Income	Sex of Head		
	Male	Female	Total
Subsistence Farming	20.1	28.1	22.2
Cash Cropping	11.7	10.8	11.5
Business	3.0	4.3	3.4
Wages and Salaries	17.9	14.7	17.0
Migrant Remittances	39.7	22.8	35.0
Other Source	0.1	0.1	0.1

Source: Bureau of Statistics, 1988B: page 21

Other than subsistence farming and migrant remittances, other sources have the same weight. However, male headed households are more inclined than female headed ones to state wages and salaries as a source of income. It has to be noted though that migrant remittances are a better source of income than subsistence agriculture.

ACCESS TO MIGRANT REMITTANCES

Presented in Table 9 are households by number of members of the household who are labour migrants. While 47 percent of male headed households have at least one member who is a migrant labourer, the respective proportion for female headed households is 24 percent. There are about twice as many male headed households with at least one household member who is a labour migrant as there are female headed ones and the pattern is true regardless of place of residence of the household.

The value of income that accrues out of migrant remittances differs according to salaries of individual migrant labourers. But the discrepancy between what female migrants earn as a salary and what their male counterparts earn is substantial. This differential necessitates consideration of the number of male labour migrants within the household; this is done in the second panel of Table 9. Although the difference between the two panels of Table 9 is small, the second panel indicates a tendency for decline among female headed households compared with male headed ones. The percentage difference

between male and female headed households with at least one member of the household who is a labour migrant has increased by at least two percentage points in the second panel of Table 9.

Table 9

Percentage Distribution of Households by Number of Members who are Labour Migrants in the Household:

Lesotho 1986/87

Residence	Sex of Head	0	1	2 and above
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Female and Male Migrants¹

Rural	Female	74	22	4
Areas	Male	50	45	5
Other	Female	80	16	4
Urban	Male	60	37	3
Maseru	Female	91	8	1
Urban	Male	78	20	2
Whole	Female	76	20	4
Country	Male	53	42	5

Male Migrants Only²

Rural	Female	80	18	2
Areas	Male	52	44	4
Other	Female	83	14	3
Urban	Male	60	38	2
Maseru	Female	93	6	1
Urban	Male	78	21	1
Whole	Female	81	17	2
Country	Male	55	42	3

Sources: 1. Lesotho 1986/87 HBS household file
2. Lesotho 1986/87 HBS individual file

The highest proportion of households with at least one household member being a migrant which is characteristic of rural areas corroborates the statement common in Lesotho that rural households depend heavily on

migrant remittances. The degree of dissimilarity between rural areas and Other Urban is, however, not pronounced while Maseru Urban has a different pattern altogether. The large majority of households without members who are migrants in Maseru Urban, particularly among female headed households, is in line with the small proportion of heads who are labour migrants (Table 4) coupled with the fact that job opportunities are better in Maseru Urban.

Discussion

The analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of Lesotho's household structure indicates that the Basotho are not only a patrilineal society, but also that men head more than two-thirds of all households in the country on de jure basis. Due to the exceptionally high level of male labour migration between Lesotho and S.A., Lesotho has one of the highest proportions of households headed by women on a de facto basis in the rural areas.

Women in Lesotho attain household headship latter in life through separation, divorce and widowhood. Separated, divorced and widowed women head more than four-fifths of all the female headed households. Age specific headship rates as well as mean age of heads portray female heads as older. While part of the age difference between female and male heads could be explained by mortality differentials between men and women, migration is producing a much older group of heads in the rural areas especially among women. For example,

the mean age difference between female heads in the rural areas and those residing in urban areas is at least 9 years, while the respective figure is 3 years for male heads.

The distribution of productive resources does not show any pronounced discrimination against female heads. While there is no evidence that households headed by females on a de jure basis have much less farming land compared to male headed households, lack of access to migrant remittances puts them at a disadvantage since subsistence farming is becoming less important as the main source of household income in Lesotho. Moreover, investing in agriculture requires financial inputs, and female headed households with no access to migrant remittances lack these to improve their agricultural production.

With respect to household income, subsistence farming, which is becoming more marginal as a source of household income compared to migrant remittances, is the main source of household income for female headed households. For example, on the average, a household's income accruing out of subsistence farming is not only small, but what a rural household earns in a year from cultivation, a Mosotho miner earns in a month (JASPA, 1979: 88). Without livestock to provide draught power or money to hire it, possession of farming land is of less economic value and it is thus not much consolation that female headed households are not discriminated against in respect to possession of farming land.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that generally female headed households are different from male headed ones in terms of both demographic structure and economic status. Female headed households are smaller although they have slightly more dependants than male headed ones. While male heads are mainly married, female heads are mostly separated, divorced or widowed. Female heads are also older than their male counterparts.

Using access to migrant remittances as a proxy for economic status, the economic status of male headed households is twice as high as that of female headed ones. Subsistence agriculture, which Basotho men are reluctant to engage in due to low labour returns compared to mine work, is the main source of household income for female headed households. Since they lack the necessary inputs to increase output from subsistence farming, income from subsistence agriculture is insufficient to meet the household basic needs. This leads to the conclusion that female headed households are of low economic status.

Labour migration is playing an important role in influencing the household structure of the country. While about three-quarters of households are headed by men on a de jure basis, due to high male out-migration into S.A., a large proportion of households (two-thirds in rural areas) is headed by women on a de facto basis.

Due to data limitations, however, a complete picture of the role of labour migration in influencing household structure cannot be fully established. For instance, it is not known how much labour migration contributes to marriage dissolutions; divorce and widowhood; both of which account for more than three-quarters of de jure female headship. There is still a need to fully investigate the impact of migration on marriage dissolutions and on widowhood in particular. A clear picture of the interaction between marriage and labour migration is necessary for proper policy formulation in the country.

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